

The University of Maine

DigitalCommons@UMaine

Maine History Documents

Special Collections

1917

Naval Battle at Machias, June 12, 1775

Daughters of the American Revolution, Hannah Weston Chapter

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digitalcommons.library.umaine.edu/mainehistory>



Part of the [History Commons](#)

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by DigitalCommons@UMaine. It has been accepted for inclusion in Maine History Documents by an authorized administrator of DigitalCommons@UMaine. For more information, please contact um.library.technical.services@maine.edu.

Pamp 2794



NAVAL BATTLE AT MACHIAS

JUNE 12, 1775



THE BRITISH held Boston with headquarters at Annapolis, N. S., only a day's sail from Machias. Every movement at Boston denoted a desire on the part of the commanding (British) officer to not only retain Boston and all New England under British supremacy, but the action of the Commander of the British Navy at Halifax indicated desire to hold Maine under the British flag, especially all that part east of Penobscot River.

When the British armed vessel Margaretta was ordered to Machias as convoy of merchant vessels to procure "lumber and boards" to build barracks and officers' houses in Boston, for use

30753

of British troops, the citizens of Machias felt resistance to be the proper thing; hence the council of war led by Capt. Jeremiah O'Brien and Col. Benjamin Foster, and the unanimous vote of the "Assembly" to make an attack on the Margarett. The vote was passed and declaration of war sent to neighboring towns June 10th. The preliminaries were agreed to on the 11th; the battle fought June 12, 1775, five days before that of Bunker Hill, and one year and twenty-two days before the Declaration of Independence was made public, July 4th, 1776. The first surrender of a naval flag by the British Crown was at Machias on the 12th day of June, being the first battle and first naval victory of the Revolution.

The "Assembly" considered it their duty to follow the noble example of our brethren at Lexington. At length, Foster, tired

of the discussion, stepped across a small brook near which the party were standing, near the original Morris O'Brien house, on what is now the Otis Crocker—Tarbell farm, and invited all who were in favor of taking Capt. Jones' vessels and the Margaretta, to cross over also. On this a large majority followed him, at once, and the minority falling in, a unanimous declaration of war was agreed upon. This was on Sunday, the 11th day of June. A plan of operation was immediately arranged. The principal officers of the Margaretta and Capt. Jones were known to be at church. It was considered desirable to make them prisoners, if possible, while they were there, that the vessels might be taken without loss of life.

A small party, with muskets, thereupon started for the purpose of surrounding the meeting house. It was a warm day and

some of the windows of the house were open. London Atus, a negro servant of Parson Lyon, was the first to discover Foster's band crossing a foot bridge, which led from Dublin Mill Island to Single Mill Island. Not knowing the object of this warlike movement, our friend London gave an outcry of alarm and jumped through a window. This movement at once attracted the attention of Jones and the officers of the Margarett, who followed London's example. Jones escaped into the woods nearby, where he secreted himself for several days. The officers succeeded in getting down to White's Point, near the old toll house, now Shaw's ship yard, where the Margarett lay, and arrived safely on board. Capt. Moore immediately weighed anchor and dropped down below the narrows, after sending word to the inhabitants that if they molested or disturbed Jones' sloop he would return and fire upon the town.

Not in the least disheartened by their defeat, Foster, Jeremiah O'Brien, and others associated with them determined to take possession of the sloops; one of them it was agreed O'Brien should take charge of, with a crew of forty men, while Foster went to the East village (now East Machias) to get a schooner ready with a complement of men there, both vessels to join company at the Rim early the next morning, and then pursue the Margarett and capture her. No time, of course, was to be lost.

A band of volunteers was soon gathered for the purpose at each place. On examining their equipments of warfare, however, there were found to be only a few charges of powder and ball, for twenty fowling-pieces, thirteen pitchforks, ten or twelve axes. Most of the powder and balls was on board of O'Brien's vessel, the Unity. "No circumstance," says a writer, "could more strik-

ingly exhibit the reckless bravery of this little band than that it should have been without an acknowledged leader until they were in sight of the enemy, when O'Brien was chosen commander by unanimous consent." Foster procured his schooner, called the Falmouth Packet, ready in due season; but before the attack was commenced on the Margaretta, his vessel got aground, leaving O'Brien to push on to the encounter single-handed.

The crew of O'Brien's vessel were about forty in number, most of them undisciplined in war, especially at sea, and were unprovided with more than three rounds of ammunition. The plan was to put the sloop alongside, and carry the Margaretta by boarding. On approaching the enemy, who was prepared for action, Capt. Moore hailed the sloop to know their demands, adding, that if they approached nearer he would fire. O'Brien called on

him to surrender, while Stevens, his lieutenant, replied to Moore that he might "fire away and be d——d." Capt. Moore seemed desirous of avoiding a collision, and the breeze from the northwest freshening, he crowded all sail. In jibbing, the *Margaretta* carried away her main-boom, but continued to stand on and ran into Holmes' Bay, where Capt. Moore took a spar out of a vessel lying there, in charge of Capt. Avery, who was pressed aboard as pilot of the *Margaretta*.

Her repairs being speedily made and the wind freshening, she stood out to sea, in the hope of escaping the sloop, which again hove in sight. But the sloop was the better sailer. Capt. Moore cut away his boats to relieve his vessel, but this proving ineffectual, he opened a fire on the sloop. The fire was returned with animation and good effect by O'Brien and his daring crew. Soon

afterwards the two vessels came together. A short conflict now took place with musketry, Capt. Moore throwing hand grenades in person. He was, however, soon shot down, and the people of the sloop immediately boarded the Margaretta. The first man who got on board was John O'Brien, and the second was Joseph Getchell—the latter often saying in his after life, "that he did not know which foot was on board of the Margaretta first, his or O'Brien's."

Capt. Moore having been mortally wounded, after a brave defense, the next in command, a young midshipman by the name of Stillingfleet, was so terrified that he jumped down into the cabin, leaving the crew of the sloop to take possession without further resistance. Of our adventurous band, one man was killed by the name of McNeil, leaving a wife and family. James Cool-

broth was mortally wounded and soon after died. Three other men were also badly wounded, namely: John Berry, who afterwards lived at Hadley's Lake, and received a pension of \$8.00 per month during his life. A ball entered his mouth and came out behind his ear. He used to say that the man who shot him fell as soon as he did. The other two men who were wounded were Isaac Taft and James Cole, who were laid up for some time under the care of a surgeon.

On board the Margaretta there were four persons killed; besides Capt. Moore, who was mortally wounded. One of them was Capt. Robert Avery, who was taken out of the coasting schooner in Holmes' Bay by Moore to act as pilot, as before mentioned. He sat on deck, it is said, completely stupefied during the action until he was shot. The other three were sailors or marines. The first

fire was made by the Margaretta and killed one man on board the sloop. The hand grenades did the most damage. The fire was returned by the sloop, killing the helmsman of the Margaretta, whose quarter deck was then for a moment abandoned. The sloop boarded, bows on, her bowsprit going through the mainsail of her foe. The vessels then swung together, and the attempt to board by our men failed by the separation of the vessels. They soon swung together again, when the battle ended in the fall of Capt. Moore.

The Margaretta was triumphantly brought up to the village (Machias) on the same day she was taken, which was Monday, the 12th of June. The crew of the Margaretta were brought to Machias, as prisoners of war, where they remained till July following. Capt. Moore was immediately landed, and every care and

attention were bestowed upon him. He was carried to the house of Stephen Jones, where he died the next day.

"Burnham Tavern," where the wounded troops were taken (picture on the next page), is the same house now standing on Main Street.

Lieut. Moore of the British Navy, in command of the Margareta, was wounded on the 12th, taken to the dwelling house of Stephen Jones in Machias, where he died June 13, 1775. The Jones house stood where the post office now stands and was torn down in 1870.

974.1905

N227



OLD BURNHAM TAVERN

Among the many interesting articles on exhibition at the Burnham Tavern
are the following:

Winged chain, covered with blue and white "Copperplate", Door Knocker.
Tavern Sign—First sign hung east of the Penobscot River, painted in Boston
and used before the Tavern of Mrs. Olive Longfellow.
Piece of ballast from the "Margaretta."
Leather Trunk once owned by Job Burnham.
Cards for carding wool and used in the Burnham family.
Light Stand made by Major Bowker, used by his family living in the Tavern.
Cape worn by Betsey Bowker, wife of Major Bowker.
Ancient chest for bedding used in the Tavern in early days.
Horse Pistol used in the first naval battle.
Piano—The first piano bought by a citizen of Machias.
Pestle and Mortar used in the Tavern by Mrs. Job Burnham.
First contribution box used in Machias. Used in Parson Lyon's Church
which stood on the present site of Libby Hall.
Chest of Drawers. A Warming-pan. A Spinning Wheel.
Carved high posted bedstead.
Knapsack, Holsters, Cartridge box, Sword. From the O'Brien Homestead.
Oil Portrait of Parson Steele the second Minister of Machias.
Drawn rug representing the first naval battle and made by Mrs. Sabrina
Watts Hall at the age of 94.

974.1905

N 227

STATE OF MAINE
COLLECTION

DOES NOT
CIRCULATE

PUBLISHED BY
THE HANNAH WESTON CHAPTER
D. A. R.
MACHIAS, - - MAINE

Press of the PARLIN PRINTING COMPANY, Machias, Maine